



TOMMIE T. PLANK

"The essence of leadership is offering oneself and one's spirit."

Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal

For the past 35 years, Mrs. Tommie Plank has been committed to serving the Tri-Lakes community and District 38; according to a colleague, "no other person has made a contribution to the school district and the community in such a graceful, meaningful, and fair-minded manner."

Tommie and her family moved to Monument in 1982. Having a son who would begin kindergarten that fall, they sought to live in a community that would provide a good quality of life and that had a strong school system. Because the Tri-Lakes community historically supports its schools and has high expectations for its students, Monument became their new home. Tommie immediately volunteered at Lewis-Palmer Elementary School as she recognized "the value of early intervention in the education of young children."

Prior to the opening of Palmer Lake Elementary, the district's second elementary school, Tommie was hired to stamp and catalog all of the materials belonging to Lewis-Palmer Elementary School. One teacher remarked that Tommie did this task cheerfully and efficiently despite how tedious and mundane it must have been. This teacher acknowledges that stamping these materials was just the beginning "of a much longer relationship in which Tommie would 'leave her mark' on District 38."

When Palmer Lake Elementary School opened in 1985, Tommie was asked to be the computer lab teacher. Tommie accepted this challenge despite not having an education degree. The school only had three small Apple computers. Having computers in school was a novel concept; therefore, Tommie created a new curriculum.

In 1989, Tommie moved to Kilmer Elementary to open its computer lab. She created an integrated computer classroom. She enjoyed working with the art teacher showing students how to create computer art and helping other teachers utilize software which enhanced their curriculums.

In 1991, Tommie was elected to the school board as the District 5 Director and served three terms. She served as the board's secretary for over 12 years. She and the board were instrumental in the successful passage of numerous bond and mill levy elections which allowed for the construction of Creekside Middle School, a new cafeteria and commons area at Palmer Lake Elementary School, the construction of an auditorium and 34 additional classrooms at Lewis-Palmer High School, the renovation of Grace Best Elementary School, and the construction of Prairie Winds Elementary School. Between 1991 and 2001, LPSD grew from a total of five schools to nine; student enrollment increased from 2,600 students to 4,900; the general fund budget increased from almost 10 million dollars to over 35 million; and teachers' salaries rose from a base salary of \$20,100 to \$27,000. The monies also

enabled the district to enhance elementary reading programs, increase staffing which reduced class sizes, provide staffing for two new schools, and purchase textbooks and instructional materials.

Tommie graduated in 1966 from the University of Oklahoma with a degree in Interior Architectural Design, and her background was invaluable in allowing her to provide input regarding the design and construction of new schools and the expansion and remodeling of current schools. The board worked closely with the architects as everyone's goal was to provide a physical structure where kids and teachers could thrive and that would be a great place for learning and living.

In 1993, Tommie and a partner opened the Covered Treasure Bookstore in Monument. Tommie became the sole proprietor in 1998. She served as a trustee on the Monument Town Council for seven years, a member the Tri-Lakes Views Steering Committee, a board member for the Historic Monument Merchant's Association, a community member at large for the Monument Hill Foundation, and a founding member of Monument's Art Hop. In 1998, Tommie was named as Tri-Lakes Chamber of Commerce Business Person of the Year.

As a community steward, Tommie helped forge many partnerships. She assisted LPSD and the town with the formation of the art park on the grounds of Big Red. Working with the Tri-Views Steering Committee and D38, the sculpture park emerged. She also initiated monthly lunch meetings with the superintendent, board members, and the town council to build and maintain that partnership. During Art Hops numerous businesses in Monument allowed students to display their artwork. Small Town Christmas involved various school choirs and bands performing during the event.

With Covered Treasure Bookstore, Tommie supports the Children's Literacy Center funding free tutoring for students in the Tri-Lakes community. Tommie also partners with Tri-Lakes Cares with the Books 4 Kids program providing children in need with reading books. Tommie has also provided sets of classroom books to district schools, supported Dr. Barbara Swaby's backpack program in which low-income elementary children are provided yearly with a minimum of 20 age-appropriate books, provided discounted books for teachers and the district, has created opportunities for classes to come to her store to practice poetry readings, and has donated gift certificates for reading marathons and Earth Day.

Tommie has left an indelible mark on the Tri-Lakes community. A former principal remarked, "Tommie Plank always did what was best for kids, not what was the easy solution. She always stood behind us as administrators, and she never forgot how hard paraprofessionals and teachers worked for the young people of our district." A former superintendent commented, Tommie's "focus, knowledge of current educational issues, problem solving ability and communication skills provided a consistent direction for the Lewis-Palmer School District... every single action taken by Tommie was purposeful and directed by her high standard of personal integrity, which enhanced the reputation of the district."

Tommie Plank is greatly honored to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. She has a profound respect for previous inductees and humbly acknowledges her place among them. She thanks her son Richard and her husband Stephen for their invaluable support. Often times, their dinner conversations included discussions about the school district and how fortunate they felt to live in the Tri-Lakes area. Richard graduated from LPHS and has two sons. Tommie wishes that her grandsons could also attend LP. Stephen also served on the school board. Both Tommie and Stephen shared the same passion in

serving their community, and their service allowed them to forge lifelong friendships with people whom they greatly admired and respected.

Tommie T. Plank truly knows the meaning of community and social responsibility. A co-worker stated that "she has given freely of her time to provide an educational home for the students of this fine district." Her unselfish service and commitment have enriched the LP community in countless ways.

By Susan Odenbaugh